

# The νόμος πολυκέφαλος in Nonnus of Panopolis’ *Dionysiaca*

## 1 The Gorgons’ Bellowing in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*

It has long been acknowledged that *Pythian Twelve*’s myth is the model for some passages of Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Pindar, who is reticent about the Gorgons’ location,<sup>2</sup> Nonnus situates the killing of Medusa and the creation of the tune of many heads in fixed geographic areas: the Carian mountain range and city of Mycale-Mycalessos or Libya.<sup>3</sup> According to the *Dionysiaca*, the city known as Μυκαλησσός takes its name from “the re-enactment of Euryale’s throat” (*D.* 13.77–78 Μυκαλησσού || Εὐρύαλης μίμημα φερώνυμον ἀνθρερώνος). This folk-etymology is a pun on Gk. μυκάομαι ‘to bellow’ (also ‘to lament’),<sup>4</sup> which Nonnus, Herodianus and Suida apply to the Gorgons’ cry,<sup>5</sup> cf. Nonn. *D.* 30.266 Εὐρύαλης μυκόμενον ἀνθρερώννα “the bellowing throat of Euryale”;<sup>6</sup> Hdn. *De Pros.* 3.2 Μυκάλη ... ἐκλήθη δὲ ἐπεὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ Γοργόνες ... μυκόμεναι τὴν κεφαλὴν Μεδοῦσης ἀνεκαλοῦντο “Mycale ... was named (so) because the remaining Gorgons ... bellowed (*mukōmenai*) and cried out to Medusa’s head”;<sup>7</sup> *Suid.* s.v.

1 As a recent reference on Nonn. *D.* 40.227–233 cf. Gigli Piccardi 2018:268–269 and Massetti 2023.

2 If we integrate γ[ύ]αλα μι[ν]υάν in Pi. fr. 70d.9 (= *Dith.* 4.9), as proposed by Lavecchia 2000:231 (differently Lobel: γ[ύ]αλα μι[δέ]α), *Dithyramb Four* contains a reference to the region of Cyrene, in Libya.

3 Mycale is the name of a city and a mountain range on the West coast of Asia Minor, corresponding today to Dilek Dağı (cf. Blümel–Lohmann 2006). It is possible to identify the place with Hitt. Arinnanda. According to *Il.* 2.869, Mycale was occupied by the Carians. Herda 2006:85–93 points out that, according to Eustathius (*ad Il.* 2.498), Perseus founded the temple of Zeus Mycalesios (dated around 700 BCE). So, he proposes that the killing of the Gorgons was already linked to the city of Mycale by the end of 8th c. BCE.

4 E.g. Theocr. 26.20 μάτηρ κεφαλὰν μυκήσατο παιδός. An analogous etymology is preserved for the homonymous Boeotian city of Mycalessos (or Mycalettos). According to Pausanias (9.19.4), Mycalettos derived its name from a cow which Cadmus had led to the city.

5 The *Etymologicum Magnum* makes a connection with μυκάομαι but associates the ‘bellowing’ with a different moment of Perseus’ endeavour, cf. *EM* 594 Μυκάλη· παρά τὸ ἐκεῖ μυκάσθαι τὰς Γοργόνας διωκούσας τὸν Περσέα.

6 Cf. also Nonn. *D.* 40.228, on which see chapter 6, section 3.

7 Cf. also Steph. Byz. *Ethn.* μ. 459.

Μυκάλη· Μυκάλη καὶ Μυκαλησός ... παρὰ τὸ ἐκεῖ μυκάσθαι τὰς Γοργόνας “Mycale and Mycalesos ... (named) after the Gorgons bellowing (*mukāsthai*) there”.

Further passages of the *Dionysiaca* are reminiscent of Pindar’s *Pythian Twelve* for their lexicon and content, since they exploit the rare *aition* of the νόμος πολυκέφαλος. Thus, not only does the following phraseological analysis cast light on how Nonnus interprets Pindar’s text, but it also clarifies his methods of ‘artistic translation’.<sup>8</sup> Below, I first focus on Nonnus’ shorter account on Athena’s musical invention (*D.* 24.35–38, section 2) and then move on to the examination of the longer mythological digressions about the ‘tune of many heads’ (*D.* 40.215–233, section 3). These two texts, I argue, are ultimately based on Pindar’s *Pythian Twelve*. Finally, I concentrate on a brief passage mentioning Euryale’s bellowing (*D.* 30.264–267, section 4), which, at least to the eyes of the modern-day interpreter, recalls both *Pythian Ten* and *Pythian Twelve*.

## 2 Nonn. *D.* 24.35–38

In the twenty-fourth book of the *Dionysica*, Dionysus is about to set ablaze the waters of river Hydaspes and the eponymous river-daimon beseeches the god to spare his stream from destruction. In listing the motivations for which Dionysus should have mercy upon him, Hydaspes recalls the Mygdonian (i.e. Phrygian) pipes, which grow on his banks. This reference paves the way to a brief digression on Athena’s musical invention, cf.

Nonn. *D.* 24.35–38

μὴ δόνακας φλέξειας, ὄθεν σέο Μυγδόνες αὐλοί,  
μὴ ποτέ σοι μέμψαιτο τεῆ φιλόμολπος Ἀθήνη,  
ἢ ποτε Γοργείων βλοσυρὸν μίμημα καρήνων  
φθεγγομένων Λίβυν εὐρεν ὀμοζυγέων τύπον αὐλῶν

Do not burn (my) reeds, which make your Mygdonian *auloi*, shall never reproach you your song-loving Athene, who once invented the Libyan type of pipes united with one yoke as the grim re-enactment of the screaming Gorgons’ heads.

<sup>8</sup> On this concept, see Conte 2014 and 2017, who discusses the creative dynamics of *imitatio* in Latin literature.

The link between the location of the reeds and the mythological parenthesis is reminiscent of *P.* 12.23–27 (cf. chapter 5, sections 2–3), verses in which the focus shifts from a mythological digression to the city of Orchomenos and the banks of the Boeotian river Cephissus, where the best reeds for the *auloi* used to grow. Nonnus' conceptual transition is in the opposite order to Pindar's: while reference to the Boeotian reeds *follows* a mythological excursus in *Pythian Twelve*, in the *Dionysiaca* the mention of Hydaspes' reeds *precedes* the mythological digression. A cross-reference analysis between Nonnus' text and his matrix reveals a variety of lexical and phraseological similarities:

- 35 δόνακας : δονάκων (*P.* 12.25, cf. chapter 5, section 3, 25), which probably hints at a specific part of the *aulos* mouthpiece in Pindar
- 35 αὐλοί : αὐλῶν (*P.* 12.19)
- 36 Ἀθήνη : Ἀθήνα (*P.* 12.8). In both Pindar's and Nonnus' texts the nom.sg. 'Athena' is placed at the end of the verse, like in traditional hexameter poetry (cf. chapter 5, section 2, 8)
- 37 ἢ ποτε : τάν ποτε (*P.* 12.6)
- 37 Γοργείων : <Γοργόνων> (*P.* 12.7)
- 37 μίμημα : μιμήσαιπ(ο) (*P.* 12.21)
- 37 καρήνων : κεφαλαίς (*P.* 12.9), κρᾶτα (*P.* 12.16), κεφαλᾶν (*P.* 12.23)
- 38 εὔρεν : ἐφεὔρε (*P.* 12.7), εὔρεν θεός ... εὔροισ'(α) (*P.* 12.22).

As already touched upon, Pindar's first reference to Athena's invention is τέχνη (*P.* 12.6) and his second κεφαλᾶν πολλᾶν νόμον (*P.* 12.23). However, commentators disagree on whether τέχνη denotes the *aulos* and the auletic art or the 'tune of many heads' (cf. chapter 1, section 3, chapter 5, section 2, 6). From *D.* 24.38 we deduce that Nonnus concurs with the interpretation of Σ *P.* 12.12a Dr., according to which τέχνη (*P.* 12.6) stands for ἀύλητική τέχνη. Certainly, the invention of the νόμος πολυκέφαλος must be after that of the instrument on which the tune is performed. As the tune combined two melodic lines, the double-piped *aulos* would appear to be the indispensable device for re-enacting the lament of the Gorgons. At the same time, the identification of Athena's invention as "the type of pipe with the same yoke" at *D.* 24.38 recalls *Pi. P.* 12.25 (cf. chapter 5, section 4, 25), in which the juxtaposition of the gen.sg. χαλκοῦ 'bronze' to the gen.pl. δονάκων 'reeds' may hint at the instrument's different parts, namely: the double reed and a bronze *syrinx* or the double reed and a bronze support connected to the *aulos* mouthpiece.

3 Nonn. *D.* 40.215–233

The fortieth book of the *Dionysiaca* includes Dionysus' final combat against Deriades, the chief of the Indian army. The Bacchoi celebrate Dionysus' victory with a paean, but immediately after that, they honour their dead with the θρήνος πολυκάρηνος. Although the reference to the 'tune of many heads' strictly involves only *D.* 40.224–233, here I present the passage along with its preceding sequence (215–223), since they both contain some pieces of relevant information.

Nonn. *D.* 40.215–233

- 215 Βάκχοι δ' ἐκροτάλιζον ἀπορρίψαντες ἐνού,  
 τοῖον ἔπος βοόωντες ὁμογλώσσω ἀπό λαιμῶν·  
 'Ἡράμεθα μέγα κῦδος· ἐπέφνομεν ὄρχαμον Ἰνδῶν'.  
 καὶ γελῶν Διόνυσος ἐπάλλετο χάρματι νίκης,  
 ἀμπνεύσας δὲ πόνοιο καὶ αἱματόεντος ἀγῶνος
- 220 πρῶτα μὲν ἐκτερέειξεν ἀτυμβεύτων στίχα νεκρῶν,  
 δωμήσας ἓνα τύμβον ἀπείριτον εὐρέι κόλπῳ  
 ἄκριτον ἀμφὶ πυρὴν ἑκατόμπεδον· ἀμφὶ δὲ νεκροῖς  
 Μυγδονίς αἰολόμολπος ἐπέκτυπεν αἴλινα σύριγξ,  
 καὶ Φρύγες αὐλητῆρες ἀνέπλεκον ἄρσενά μολπήν
- 225 πενθαλέοις στομάτεσσιν, ἐπωρχήσαντο δὲ Βάκχαι  
 ἀβρὰ μελιζομένοιο Γανύκτορος Εὐάδι φωνῆ·  
 καὶ Κλεόχου Βερέκυντες ὑπὸ στόμα δίζυγες αὐλοῖ  
 φρικτὸν ἐμυκήσαντο Λίβυν γόνον, ὃν πάρος ἄμφω  
 Σθεννώ τ' Εὐρυάλη τε μιῆ πολυδειράδι φωνῆ
- 230 ἀρτιτόμῳ<sup>9</sup> βροίζηδὸν ἐπεκλαύσαντο Μεδούση  
 φθεγγομένων κεφαλήσι διηκοσίησι δρακόντων,  
 ὧν ἄπο μυρομένων σύριγμα κομάων  
 θρήνον πολυκάρηνον ἐφημίξαντο Μεδούσης

The Bacchoi played the cymbals, sending out a *enuō*-cry, **shouting** this **word from** their throats, which spoke with the same tongue:—*We obtained great glory! We killed the leader of the Indians!*—And Dionysus laughing exulted for the joy of victory, *enjoying a respite from trouble and the gory battle. Firstly, he honoured the ranks of unburied dead by building a single huge mound with a wide bottom around a 100-foot common*

9 Cf. A.R. 4.1515 Γοργόνος ἀρτίτομον κεφαλῆν.

pyre. The Mygdonian syrinx, of modulated song, resounded a funeral lament and the Phrygian auletes **braided a male song with (their) sorrowful lips**, the Bacchai danced to that, while Ganytor delicately sang with the *euoé*-voice. And **under the mouth** of Cleochos the Berektynian pipes, **with twofold yoke, bellowed the awful Libyan lament, which once both Sthenno and Euryale with one many-throated voice, uncontrollably cried on newly-beheaded Medusa. As the two hundred serpents screamed, from whose bewailing heads a hissing came, they voiced a many-headed *thrēnos* for Medusa.**

At a first glance, 215–218 are a variation on the typical scene of the victorious warrior boasting over the defeated enemy (cf. Fenik 1968, Kyriakou 2001:273). Especially, 217 emulates *Il.* 22.393,<sup>10</sup> which, as Nagy 1979:79 points out, virtually includes two verses of a paean, cf.

<i>Il.</i> 22.393	Nonn. <i>D.</i> 40.217	
Ἡράμεθα μέγα κῦδος	Ἡράμεθα μέγα κῦδος	–UU–UU– –
ἐπέφνομεν Ἐκτορα δῖον	ἐπέφνομεν ὄρχαμον Ἴνδῶν	U–UU–UU– –

Nevertheless, it is also possible to connect *D.* 40.215–220 with some details of *P.* 12. As previously discussed (cf. chapter 5, section 2, 11), Schadewaldt (1928) proposes that the verb ἄσεν in *P.* 12.11 describes a shout of triumph.<sup>11</sup> If this interpretation is correct, ἔπος βοόωντες (Nonn. *D.* 40.216) may parallel *P.* 12.11. This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that, in Greek, βοάω and ἄνω came to be perceived as synonyms. An example of this semantic overlap is found in Hesychius' lexicon, although the source of the gloss is unknown and we cannot precisely date the synchronic link preserved in it, cf. Hsch. μ 133 LC μακρὸν ἄυσε· μεγάλως ἐβόησεν. Furthermore, the sequence of events found in Nonnus perfectly parallels Pindar's: the winner's shout of triumph is followed by a funeral lamentation: Dionysus exults over Deriades in a similar way to Perseus exulting over the 'third part of the sisters'; the Bacchoi honour their dead with the *thrēnos* which Athena invented to imitate the Gorgons' lament for Medusa. In this connection, the reference to the *sequence* of the performance in *D.* 40.219–220 (*ἀμπνεύσας δὲ πάνοιο ... πρώτα μὲν ἐκτερέϊξεν ἀτυμβεύτων στίχα νεκρῶν*), resembles the sequence of Athena's composition in *P.* 12.18–19 (*ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐκ τούτων φίλον ἄνδρα πόνων || ἐρρύσατο, παρθένος αὐλῶν*

10 On the similarities and discrepancies between this passage and *Il.* 22.395–472 cf. Bannert-Kröll 2016:490–491.

11 A battle cry is also possible, cf. chapter 9, section 4.1.

τεύχε πάμφωνον μέλος): in both texts, the κεφαλᾶν πολλᾶν νόμος is performed *after* the πόνος of the victory.

In particular, the θρήνος πολυκάρηνος is performed to honour the dead of Dionysus' army and thus entails a 'memorial'. In this connection it is significant that Pindar calls the *nomos* invented by Athena a εὐκλεῆς μναστήρ ἀγώνων at *P.* 12.24. By applying εὐκλεῆς to μναστήρ, Pindar stresses the indissoluble tie between 'memory/thought' and the attainment of glory through poetry and music. The tune of many heads acquires a 'memorial' dimension because it *brings back to mind* and *confers glory on* (εὐκλεῆς μναστήρ) wars/contests (ἀγώνων) and the people who took part in them. The representation of the *nomos*' performance in Nonnus matches its definition in *P.* 12.24: the θρήνος πολυκάρηνος honours the dead of Dionysus' army, as such it is a glory-making memento of the warriors' fight.

Yet Nonnus' passage differs from its Pindaric model in a few crucial details. Although elsewhere Nonnus credits Athena with the invention of the double-piped *aulos* (see above, section 2), in *D.* 40.215–233 the goddess is out of the picture. Moreover, Pindar's word choice alludes to a distinction between the unarticulated, animalistic *goos* of the Gorgons and Athena's artistically fashioned *thrēnos* (cf. chapter 5, section 2, 8, 21), while Nonnus treats *goos* (228) and *thrēnos* (233) as synonyms, applying both terms to Euryale's and Sthenno's lament. Phraseological comparison between Nonn. *D.* 40.224–233 and *Pythian Twelve* allows us to recognize further common traits:

224 ἀνέπλεκον ἄρσενα μολπὴν : θρήνον διαπλέξαισ' Ἀθάνα (*P.* 12.8). Pindar does not identify Athena's composition as male or female. The fact that 'male' (ἄρσενα) describes the melody woven by the Phrygian pipes reflects a situation opposite to the one we reconstruct within Greek traditional hexameter poetry, where lamenting and weaving are typical activities of women (cf. chapter 5, section 2.1)

225 πενθαλέοις στομάτεσσιν : δυσπενθέι σὺν καμάτῳ (*P.* 12.10), καρπαλιμᾶν γενύων (*P.* 12.20)

227 δίζυγες αὐλοί : διανισόμενον χαλκοῦ θαμὰ καὶ δονάκων (*P.* 12.21): the opposition χαλκοῦ (sg.) vs δονάκων (pl.) hints at the two-piped double-reed *aulos* (see above, section 2)

228 φρικτὸν ἐμυκήσαντο ... γόον : ἐρικλάγκταν γόον (*P.* 12.21)

229 Σθεννώ τ' Εὐρυάλη : Εὐρυάλας (*P.* 12.20)

229 μιῆ πολυδειράδι φωνῆ recalls both κεφαλᾶν πολλᾶν νόμον (*P.* 12.23, see below) and αὐλῶν ... πάμφωνον μέλος (*P.* 12.19)

230 ροιζήδόν lit. 'rushing', which I freely translated as 'uncontrollably' may be interpreting καρπαλιμᾶν (*P.* 12.20, of Euryale's jaws)

231 κεφαλῆσι ... δρακόντων : ὀφίων κεφαλαίς (*P.* 12.9); furthermore, φθεγγομένων κεφαλῆσι διηκοσίησι δρακόντων is comparable to *Pi.* fr. 70b.15 (= *Dith.* 2.15) μυρίων φθογγάζεται κλαγγαίς δρακόντων “(Athena’s aegis) screams with the cries of a thousand serpents” (cf. Accorinti 2004:100, fn. ad 231). The resemblance is even more significant because the serpents on Athena’s aegis belong to Medusa’s head

232 ἄπο μυρομένων ... κομάων : ὑπό τ’ ἀπλάτοις ὀφίων κεφαλαίς ... λειβόμενον (*P.* 12.9–10), the comparison μυρομένων and λειβόμενον is supported by an Hesychian gloss, which interprets μύρειν as ‘to cry’, cf. *Hsch.* μ 1887 LC μύρειν· ῥεῖν [ὑδωρ.] κλαίειν, θρηνεῖν

233 θρήνον πουλυκάρηνον : κεφαλᾶν πολλᾶν νόμον (*P.* 12.23).

#### 4 Nonn. *D.* 30.264–267

In Nonn. *D.* 30.249 ff. Athena confronts Dionysus who is trying to get away from the battlefield. In holding up the achievements of his archrival Perseus to the god, the goddess recalls her role as helper of the hero in the fight against the Gorgons.

Nonn. *D.* 30.264–267

Λιβύης ἐπέβης; ἢ Περσέος εἶχες ἀγῶνα;  
ἢ Σθεννοῦς ἴδες ὄμμα λιθώπιδος ἢ καὶ αὐτῆς  
δύσμαχον Εὐρυάλης μυκώμενον ἀνθερεῶνα;  
ἢ πλοκάμους ἐνόησας ἐχιδνοκόμοιο Μεδούσης

Have you gone to Libya? Have you had the task of Perseus? Have you seen the eye of Sthenno **which turns** (things) **to stone**, or also the **bellowing invincible throat of Euryale** herself? Have you seen the **tresses of viper-hair Medusa**?

Nonnus’ expressions partly resemble those of Pindar’s *Pythian Ten* and *Pythian Twelve*:

265 λιθώπιδος vaguely recalls λίθινον θάνατον φέρων (*P.* 10.48) and, more faintly, λαοῖσι τε μοῖραν ἄγων (*P.* 12.12), since λαοῖσι may create a wordplay with λάας ‘stone’ (cf. chapter 5, section 2, 12)

266 δύσμαχον ... ἀνθερεῶνα is reminiscent of ἀπλάτοις ὀφίων κεφαλαίς (*P.* 12.9)

266 μυκώμενον may be compared to ἐρικλάγκταν γοόν (*P.* 12.21), as Gk. κλαγγή suggests an association with “animalistic sounds” (cf. chapter 5, section 2, 21)

266 Εὐρυάλης ... ἀνθερεώνα vaguely recalls Εὐρυάλας ἐκ ... γενύων (*P.* 12.20), since both throat and jaws are body parts involved in the emission of sounds  
 267 πλοκάμους ... ἐχιθνοκόμοιο Μεδούσης<sup>12</sup> is comparable to ποικίλον κάρα || δρακόντων φόβαισιν “(her) head adorned with locks of serpents” (*P.* 10.46–47), as both passages seem to compare the patterns formed by Medusa’s snaky head with those of dressed hair.

## 5 Conclusions

From the analysis of three passages by Nonnus concerning Athena, her invention, and the Gorgons, it is possible to deduce Nonnus’ solution to a few debated aspects of *Pythian Twelve*, namely:

- (i) The match between Nonn. *D.* 24.37 Γοργείων and *P.* 12.7 <Γοργόνων> indirectly supports the integration <Γοργόνων> from Σ *P.* 12.15ab Dr., as proposed by von Schroeder 1900 (cf. Pavese 1990:71);
- (ii) Nonn. *D.* 24.38 ὀμοζυγέων τύπον αὐλῶν identifies Athena’s invention with the double-piped *aulos* and not with the νόμος πολυκέφαλος. Nonnus thus aligns with Σ *P.* 12.12a Dr., according to which the τέχνα (6) discovered by Athena is auletic art itself;
- (iii) The fact that, in Nonn. *D.* 40.216, ἔπος βοόωντες precedes the *thrēnos* section parallels the sequence of mythological events, which we reconstruct for *Pythian Twelve* by accepting the reading ἄυσεν at 11. This coincidence, however, cannot be considered decisive. A shout of triumph over the defeated enemy or a battle cry is a *topos* of warlike contexts. Consequently, there is no guarantee that Nonnus read ἄυσεν nor that *D.* 40.216 relies upon Pindar’s *Pythian Twelve*;
- (iv) The correspondence between ἀνέπλεκον ... μολπὴν (Nonn. *D.* 40.224) and θρήνον διαπλέξαισ’ (α) speaks in favour of διαπλέκω meaning ‘to weave’, i.e. ‘to fashion’ (cf. Held 1998), not ‘to interweave’ (as *per* Clay 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nonn. *D.* 36.20 ποιητὴν πλοκαμίδα νόθης ἐχάραξε Μεδούσης “the counterfeit hair of Medusa’s image” (with reference to Athena’s aegis).